

Cortland Bergman

American History to 1877

Dr. Luck

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Kentucky Speech given by Character D.L. Roberts

Money—yes, money—is the lifeblood of any nation’s strength. It is the sinew that binds industry, the foundation upon which security is built, and the means by which a people may safeguard their future. And I rise today to say plainly: let us use ours wisely. Let us build. Let us fortify. Let us secure Kentucky’s people, her land, and her future prosperity.

We have heard much in this chamber from our learned colleague, Mr. Binton Bawyer, who has presented figures meant to assure us of the North’s economic strength and its supposed independence. Yet I am reminded of the Good Book:

“He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.” (Proverbs 18:17)

Let us, then, search these claims carefully and without illusion. For as James Henry Hammond has calculated, the Southern states produce, in foreign exports alone, upwards of \$185,000,000 in value, nearly double that

of the North's \$95,000,000. And of that Northern figure, we are told that no less than \$87,000,000 flows through New York alone.

What does this reveal? It reveals not independence, but dependence—dependence upon Southern production, upon Southern labor, upon Southern soil. New York, that great commercial hub so often held up as a pillar of Northern strength, derives its prominence largely from the handling, financing, and export of cotton. Remove that cotton—remove the fruits of Southern industry—and what remains?

This is no small matter. It is not mere regional pride that I speak of, but economic reality. The wealth of this nation flows from Southern soil. Our agriculture, our labor, our commerce, sustain not only ourselves, but much of the wider world. European industry turns upon Southern cotton. American trade depends upon Southern staples. The prosperity is there. The strength is there.

I ask you, gentlemen: shall we leave it undefended?

Shall we stand idle while the very foundation of our prosperity is questioned, constrained, and in some quarters openly threatened? Shall we trust that others, who do not share our interests and who increasingly oppose our institutions, will safeguard what we ourselves neglect to protect?

I say nay. Prudence demands more of us. As the Good Book tells us, we are stewards, so let us be "Good and Faithful servants." (Matthew 25:23)

I propose, therefore, that we direct a portion of our state resources toward the construction of fortifications along our northern border. Not as an act of aggression, not as a signal of hostility, but as an act of foresight—of sober, measured prudence in uncertain times.

These works, gentlemen, will serve us in three vital ways.

First, they will secure our frontier in a time of growing uncertainty. We cannot blind ourselves to the reality before us. The Union trembles under the weight of sectional discord. Passions are inflamed. Trust is eroded. Institutions once accepted are now openly challenged. In such an hour, it is not enough to hope for peace, we must prepare to preserve it. A prepared Commonwealth is a safe Commonwealth. A fortified frontier is not a declaration of war, but a safeguard against chaos.

Second, these fortifications will aid in the enforcement of our lawful and constitutional rights. As has been observed by Stephen F. Hale:

“The law of Congress for the rendition of fugitive slaves... remains almost a dead letter... A majority of the Northern States... have openly nullified it...”

Here, gentlemen, we confront definitive facts. Laws enacted under the Constitution itself are disregarded. Rights plainly recognized are obstructed. Penalties are imposed not upon violators, but upon those who would uphold the law. Northern states have clearly severed the bonds between states, just as much as southern states have.

If others reject their obligations under the compact of these states, then we must be prepared to fulfill ours, and to defend our rights where they are threatened. By securing our borders, we ensure that property recognized under the Constitution is not lost to lawlessness, nor surrendered to neglect. We act not in defiance of the Union, but in defense of the principles upon which it was founded.

Third, such measures will strengthen our standing among our Southern neighbors. Kentucky does not stand alone in this moment. We are bound by ties of commerce, of culture, and of mutual interest to the states of the South. By demonstrating both capability and resolve—by showing that we are prepared to secure our rights and uphold our obligations and return fugitives, we reinforce bonds of trust. We show that Kentucky is not a passive observer, but a capable and reliable partner in whatever course the future may require.

Now, some may ask, and it is a fair question, why fortify the North and perhaps earn their ire? Why look to that border, rather than elsewhere?

I answer plainly: because it is there that hostility is most pronounced. It is there that our institutions are denounced, our rights questioned, and our laws disregarded. It is there that interference is most likely to arise, not from formal invasion, perhaps, but from the steady and corrosive undermining of our legal and economic foundations.

We shan't ignore the signs of preparation beyond our borders. Reports of militia activity and the strengthening of positions across the Ohio River ought not to be dismissed lightly. At Camp Jackson in Ohio, renovations and improvements are underway. Others, it seems, are not content to rely upon words alone—they prepare.

And I ask you again: if others prepare, shall we remain idle?

Shall Kentucky, with all her wealth, all her strategic position, all her importance to this nation, choose inaction where prudence calls for readiness?

No, gentlemen. Preparation is not provocation—it is wisdom. Strength is not aggression, it is security. To be ready is not to seek conflict, but to ensure that, should conflict come, we are neither surprised nor defenseless.

Let us be clear: I do not call for rash action. I do not urge haste or recklessness. Kentucky has long been a voice of moderation, and I would see her remain so. But meekness does not mean weakness. Prudence does not mean inaction.

Let us act, then, not in fear, but in foresight. Let us take the prosperity we possess—the wealth drawn from our soil, our labor, and our commerce—and use it to secure the future we desire. Let us ensure that whatever course Kentucky may one day choose, she does so from a position of strength, unity, and preparedness.

So let it never be said that Kentucky, standing at the crossroads of this great crisis, failed to provide for her own defense.

Works Cited

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